Interview with Walter C. Carrington

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR WALTER C. CARRINGTON

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: I am interviewing Ambassador Walter Carrington in his office at the Howard University Law School in Washington, DC, concerning his service as Ambassador to Senegal. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Mr. Ambassador, I wonder if you could give an idea of what your interests and experiences were in foreign affairs were prior to your appointment as an Ambassador.

CARRINGTON: I had been involved in African affairs I guess almost since I graduated from college. In fact, I remember two weeks after graduating from college going off to Senegal as part of an American youth delegation to the Conference of the World Assembly of Youth which was held in Dakar, Senegal in 1952, marking I think the first international conference ever held in Africa.

Q: I was going to say, this was very early in the rebirth of Africa on the international scene.

CARRINGTON: That's right, yes. And not long after the war, long before independence, and that sort of got me started and whetted my appetite. When I came back, I went on to law school but kept an interest in international affairs, and then a few years later took a group over to Nigeria for the Experiment in International Living. And then in '61 when

the Peace Corps began, I got involved with the Peace corps very early and was part of the original group of seven overseas directors that Sargent Shriver appointed. And my assignment was to go out and negotiate with the government of Sierra Leone to have the Peace Corps come there. And after the successful negotiations, I became the first Peace Corps Director in Sierra Leone and served there from 1961 to 1963.

Q: While we're on Sierra Leone, in fact, I'd like to ask two questions. One, what was your impression of Senegal when you went there in 1952?

CARRINGTON: Well, first of all, it was for me an overwhelming experience, being a young black American and going to Africa for the first time, and very early in that trip going to the island of Goree and seeing the slave house, the place from which the slaves left for the voyage to the United States was a very emotional sort of thing.

I was impressed at the time by a lot of the young students that I met both from Senegal and from others parts of Africa who were all talking about how they were going to bring about independence in their country. And this was the great push. In fact, the great political fight at that conference was really between the Africans and the French who were trying to keep control of the African delegations and the American delegation sided very much with the African. So I got involved at a very early time with a lot of the people who were later to become leaders in the various countries.

Q: These were mostly from the francophone countries.

CARRINGTON: Most of the Africans were francophone although there were people from Anglophone countries as well, but you had just by shear numbers more countries in what was then French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa. But there were people from Ghana, from Sierra Leone, from Nigeria and from East Africa there as well.

Senegal at that time—Dakar as I remember was a kind of sleepy city. None of the skyscrapers that are there now. The Place d'Independence was then a open sort of dirt

covered field where the buses from up country—would gather and people would get buses and go back out. There has been, of course, tremendous development and growth in Senegal since then. But I remember Senghor was back in the country. He was at the time a member of the French Senate.

Q: This is Leopold?

CARRINGTON: Yes, Leopold Sedar Senghor, the first President of Senegal and a member of the French Senate. In fact, the person who wrote the final draft of the first French constitution after the war. Senghor was regarded by everyone as the finest stylist in the French language. So that I got an impression of Dakar and of Africa as a place sort of bubbling with a ferment of coming independence.

Q: When you went to Sierra Leone, what were your prime tasks there with the Peace Corps?

CARRINGTON: Well, after we had negotiated the agreement and agreed that the Peace Corps would come in, we decided that we would start with an education program, and so we brought a lot of teachers in to teach in the secondary schools throughout the country. In fact, it was the advent of the Peace Corps that allowed the government to really expand the education system from just a few schools in the capital city and in a couple of the other cities really into the hinterlands where up until that time most of the school were mission schools. So the government was able to really beef up their schools, so that the original project was to bring over teachers.

We then in a joint project with CARE brought over a group of rural development workers and people who were working on road construction and that kind of thing, and then we had nurses. And the program got to be quite varied. In fact, when I left we had in Sierra Leone the largest Peace Corps program on a per capita basis in the world.

Q: Would you describe the government of Sierra Leone when you were there and dealing with it?

CARRINGTON: Yes. The Peace Corps arrived there about six months after independence. The country became independent in April of '61.

Q: From the British?

CARRINGTON: From the British. And I went out there I guess in August to begin the negotiations. Our first group of volunteers arrived, in fact, on New Year's Day of '62. And the government was headed by Sir Milton Margai, who was a leading physician in the country and whose Sierra Leone People's Party had won the elections leading up to independence, and his party mostly represented the Mende tribe, which was one of the largest tribes in the country. And at the time it appeared as if Sierra Leone was going to be a real vigorous parliamentary democracy.

In fact, I remember being there for the first elections. And I was struck by the vitality of some of the political rallies, and listening to some of these political debates where they talked in Creole, some would call it a kind of pidgin English, but a language that was rich with imagery. And I had just never heard invective against a political opponent that was so flourishing in imagery as there. And it was a very vigorous political system. There were problems because after the election there were charges that a lot of the polling had been unfair and there had been places where government ministers had been elected with overwhelming votes and then there were some court case I remember coming out of this. And a couple of the leading ministers had to defend themselves in court against charges of irregularities. But the country had a very vigorous independent judiciary and a very vigorous political system.

When I left there in '63 the founding president, Sir Milton Margai, was still in power, and the country seemed to be going along well. He died shortly after that. His brother became

president, and when his brother Albert Margai stood for re-election, he lost the election but had kind of an internal coup and by manipulating the chiefs—there is a system whereby part of the legislature is made up of appointed chiefs. And he rigged it in such a way that he stayed in power, which lead eventually to a coup d'etat in the country and really the end of hopes that Sierra Leone would have become, as Senegal did become, a real functioning, two-party democratic system.

Q: How did you find yourself received—and I am thinking not just yourself, but the Peace Corps program—at our Embassy, because this was something new grafted onto them and looked with, in some cases, a certain amount of suspicion by the Foreign Service.

CARRINGTON: Well, there was no question about that. I had more problems I think especially with AID than I had with the Sierra Leone government.

Q: You were breaking their rice bowl?

CARRINGTON: Yes, just about. Well, first of all, there was resentment that Peace Corps was going to be coming in and really encroaching in areas that AID saw as its own. And there were resentments that I came in at a rank which was equal to or higher than of the AID director. And I remember that the license plates in the country were given out according to rank. And there was a USA 1, a USA 2, a USA 3, and my car was USA 4. And this did not endear me with some of the AID people. I must say, though, that the Ambassador—

Q: Who was the Ambassador?

CARRINGTON: The Ambassador was a former Congressman named Carnahan from Missouri, a fellow who looked and talked just like Harry Truman, and he was very supportive. And so I was a member of the country team as the Peace Corps Director, and when disputes came up between AID and the Peace Corps, he generally supported us

and was able to keep peace. I must say that original animosity began to disappear by the time I left.

Q: Well, it was new program.

CARRINGTON: Yes, it was a very new program. Peace Corps, because it was new, was able to do things that the other agencies couldn't do. We could spend money quicker. We could get things done quicker. And this caused resentments.

Q: Going back a bit. You say you were there when the Peace Corps was being set up and developing its program. Could you describe it a little about some of the issues and what you were doing here in Washington as you got involved with that.

CARRINGTON: Yes. I originally got involved with the Peace Corps very soon after it was established on a kind of part time basis. I got a call from the Peace Corps office asking if I would spend some time recruiting for them.

Q: You were doing what by that time?

CARRINGTON: I was then in Boston practicing law, and I was a Commissioner on our state Commission Against Discrimination. It was a three member commission. So I was doing that and practicing law. And I got a call from someone in the Peace Corps asking if I would do some part time recruiting. So I spent my weekends traveling around the country recruiting people for the Peace Corps. In those days recruiting for the Peace Corps really meant not much more than just getting information out because you didn't really have to persuade people. There were a lot of people waiting to sort of join. It was a question of telling them how to do it. And so I did that.

And through that I met Sarge Shriver, and Shriver convinced me to come with the Peace Corps. I at that time was about—in fact, I had already formed a committee. I was running for the City Council in Cambridge, Mass. And Shriver convinced me that there were much

more exciting things to do with the Peace Corps and that after the Peace Corps I could always go back to Massachusetts and I could have the support of the Kennedys and all of that for higher office.

So anyway I decided I would go with the Peace Corps and spent my time in Washington —in fact, I wasn't in Washington all that long, getting acquainted with the Peace Corps but mainly trying to set up a lot of logistical things that had to be done. In those early days we were kind of flying by the seat of our pants, and I remember, in spite of all the work I did trying to educate people about Sierra Leone, because there were very few people in the Peace Corps who had any overseas experience, and very few if any who knew anything about Africa. I had been to Africa twice when I went there, so I was kind of an expert.

But I remember being up in Sierra Leone the first few months we were out there, and we got a shipment of books in Spanish because somebody in one of the support offices of the Peace Corps thought that Sierra Leone was Spanish. I had to point out to them not only was it not Spanish speaking but the word Sierra Leone was not Spanish, it was Portuguese. But it was an English speaking country. But there were little hitches like that, but we overcame them.

The other thing I did when I was in the states was to get involved in the training program for the first group that was coming over to Sierra Leone, and they were trained at Columbia Teachers College. And I remember spending a good bit of time with them and helping in their orientation.

Q: You were there during the high point with the great burst of enthusiasm for the Peace Corps. How effective were your volunteers out in the field?

CARRINGTON: I think they were very effective. One of the things you often got volunteers saying was that they felt that they had gotten more out of the experience than they were able to give.

Q: I've heard this.

CARRINGTON: But I think that in many cases that they didn't have a kind of perspective to see really how important they were. As I said earlier, I think there's just no question that in Sierra Leone and a number of other countries the ability of the countries to expand their secondary educational system was tremendously aided by having the Peace Corps volunteers. If they had not had them, I think that the movement to spread education on a secondary level beyond the capital, beyond the coast, would have been a much slower process. Also, I think the Peace Corps had a great influence as sort of role models because in so many countries there was a stigma against working out in the hinterlands. And here you had these young Americans coming out there and going out and working in some of the most remote corners and doing it with great enthusiasm and working for pay that was the same that was given to Sierra Leone teachers. So unlike other expatriates and who had come out there and who would live in air conditioned isolation, who would receive a salary that was topped off by their governments, the Peace Corps volunteers were living like the people with whom they were working. And I think this helped.

I think in some of the other projects we had, the community development projects, we were able to be effective. I'm not sure that the Peace Corps contribution was as long lasting as some of the others, because whereas in the schools the government had already made an investment in the institution that even when the volunteers left those institutions would continue. In a lot of rural development projects, once the volunteers left and if there weren't more volunteers coming in, often the government would not be putting the same kinds of resources into those programs, so that that became a problem with the continuing costs of some of the activities. But I think on the whole that the Peace Corps volunteers were extremely effective at least in Africa, and I think they made a difference.

I at one point was asked to do what we called a completion of service conference which is done for every group just before they leave the country where you sort of sit down and debrief them and you go through what happened and so forth and get their ideas

for improvements. And I went down to Latin America to do one in Venezuela and one in what was then British Honduras, now Belize. And it was as if it was two different Peace Corps. There you had volunteers who were very disaffected, who felt that they really hadn't been very important because they weren't part of a government structure. In Africa the volunteers knew that they were working for the Africa governments. In Latin America in many places, the volunteers were practically parachuted into the barrios and sort of told to find a job. Whereas, the volunteers in Africa had well defined jobs and knew what they were doing. So I think the Peace Corps was quite successful in Africa.

Q: You were a Director in the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone from about '61 to '63?

CARRINGTON: Yes, from '61 to '63 and then I came back to the United States in the summer of '63 and was here from about three months during the period of great trauma and change in the United States. I got here just before the march on Washington. In fact, I got a chance to participate in that.

Q: This is the Martin Luther King march?

CARRINGTON: Yes, right. And I got a chance to participate in that. And I stayed in the country until shortly after the assassination of President Kennedy. So I was here for that whole period. And then went out to Tunisia and was there for two years.

Q: Again with the Peace Corps?

CARRINGTON: Yes, again with the Peace Corps. Spent two years in Tunisia from '63 to '65 and then went from Tunisia to Senegal where I was Peace Corps Director from '65 to '67.

Q: Putting these two ones together, since we are looking at this from a sort of professional point of view, were there differences in how the Peace Corps fitted into the operations in Tunisia/Senegal as opposed to Sierra Leone? I'm speaking of American operations?

CARRINGTON: No, again, when I try to think about the relations, for example, with the rest of the Embassy in Tunisia, we had a very supportive ambassador, Francis Russell. I can't recall any real conflicts with the AID mission there, nothing like we had initially in Sierra Leone. Things went rather smoothly in terms of our operations in Tunisia, vis-a-vis the rest of the American establishment there.

Q: You are looking at Senegal more than ten years later.

CARRINGTON: Thirteen years later.

Q: Have you seen much of a change? Did you see much of a change?

CARRINGTON: Oh, yes. Well, first of all, the physical change was very pronounced. In fact, when I was Peace Corps director I lived on Place d'Independence in an apartment building that didn't exist when I had been there before, and a lot of the people whom I had first met as students were now moving up in government and in other areas so that I had a lot of people that I knew when I arrived in the country.

The political situation then was one where Senghor was President and had a kind of modified multi-party system which he devised with sort of French Cartesian logic. He looked at Senegal and said there were four major political tendencies in the country. There is a conservative tendency, a liberal democratic tendency, a socialist tendency, and a Marxist tendency; and there ought to be political parties that represent each of these tendencies. And so he decreed that there would be four political parties. His party would be the socialist party and then these other parties could organize, so you had a four party system. Anyone who wanted to organize had to organize within this framework.

At the same time, you had a lot of magazines which came out monthly and some newspapers which came out weekly which represented all kinds of political views, so that you had then a very open and free kind of political expression going on in the country.

I was there, I remember, at the onset of the first drought which took place in 66-67.

Q: This is the beginning of the Sahel droughts?

CARRINGTON: Right. And I remember it because in 1966 Senegal hosted the First International Festival of Negro Art, in which they brought together people from all over the world in a tremendous cultural festival, and it cost the government some money. Not long after that was when the rains ceased and the drought began, and there was a lot of talk among his opponents and talk out in the bush that we never had a festival before and we've never had a drought before, so there must be some connection between the two. That's how I remember when that drought first happened. And, of course, the Senegalese economy has not been as strong since then as it was when I was there in the mid to late '60s.

Q: What was the Peace Corps—what were we doing? Here we were Americans in a francophone country with the French culture, a President who was a major literary light among other things within the French society. What were we doing and how were we received there as the Peace Corps?

CARRINGTON: Well, again, one of our largest programs was teaching, but teaching there meant teaching English. And this was something that Senghor very much wanted. He wanted to have every educated Senegalese to be fluent in both French and English.

Q: Why do you thing this? This is so almost untypical, I would say, of someone brought up in the French culture?

CARRINGTON: Well, yes, but Senghor very much believed in what he called the concept of negritude, and he felt that it was important that the intelligentsia of the black world be able to communicate with one another. And he felt that English was important and that the

best way to learn English was to be taught by a native English speaker. And so we had a lot of people teaching English.

Q: So you received the full cooperation of the government?

CARRINGTON: Yes. Yes, we did. We had the full cooperation of the government on that program.

We had another program which was a program mostly of women who were working in rural clinics around the country and in what were kind of social centers in various parts of the country. And they were working with women on a number of different kinds of programs teaching them about maternal-child health, nutrition, etc. And this program was extremely effective. We had some volunteers who became very fluent in the Wolof language and were able to do, I think, some really useful things.

The problem that we had with that program was that it was tremendously underfunded by the government. And, in fact, the person who was the junior minister in charge of that whole program for the government was not very competent. In fact, he was a relative of the President. And so we were always fighting trying to get better support. And the success of the program often depended upon how cooperative the local officials were and how well our volunteers were able to relate to them.

But the Peace Corps program which still goes on in Senegal and has expanded was well received because, I think, the volunteers were able to so identify with the communities in which they lived. In fact, I remember when I went back as Ambassador and was making my initial rounds meeting all of the ministers in their offices almost every conversation I had the minister would begin by telling a story about a Peace Corps volunteer who had lived in his village and who spoke Wolof almost as well as he did. So that there was this lasting memory of what the Peace Corps volunteers had done in Senegal.

Q: The Peace Corps is sort of an interesting creature in that it is both a part of the American effort government effort in a place. You're a member of the country team. How would this work? I mean, would you find yourself on divergent courses? How did you work within an Embassy? I'm speaking now as Peace Corps Director.

CARRINGTON: Right. Well, one of the first things that would happen—as you remember, when the Peace Corps started, there was an attempt in a number of places to try to brand the volunteers as spies. And the story is told that Lyndon Johnson when he was Vice President told Sargent Shriver, he said, “Look, you'd better be wary of three things, of the 3 C's when you take over the Peace Corps.” He said, “Cuties, communists and the CIA” And, in fact, the Peace Corps was really paranoid about having anybody as a volunteer or staff person who had in any way been involved with intelligence, people who had been in military intelligence, or whatever.

Q: So many of us I know like myself, when we were drafted into the Korean War or what have you, college graduates who normally go to Peace Corps often ended up in intelligence.

CARRINGTON: Right. And these people were not welcomed in the Peace Corps. And I must say that in spite of all the stories that one has heard over the years about how the CIA has been a rogue elephant, etc., the one agreement that they kept religiously was the agreement not to interfere with the Peace Corps. And, in fact, almost the first thing that would happen when I'd arrive in a country, some guy would come up to me and shake my hand and say, I'm so and so, I'm the station chief here and we'll probably never be able to talk again socially. And they kept their distance from the Peace Corps.

The people whom we had to ride herd on often were the political officers, who when they traveled out it was natural, they'd want to talk with the Peace Corps volunteers about what was going on and so forth. And some of them would say to the volunteers, you know, when you're in town feel free to stay with us and so on. Well, there were two things. One,

we wanted to keep the distance of the volunteers from the Embassy and those kinds of things and, also, we did not want volunteers when they came to town to be staying with Americans. We wanted them to live in the cheapest hotel they could find—that sort of thing—so that being a member of the country team we were able to know what was going on and often to make contributions, because I knew a good bit about the countries before I came there and I probably traveled around the country more than any other member of the country team, because I had to visit volunteers wherever they were.

Q: Well, how would the Ambassador use you? I mean you have a country team and you're deciding on what recommendations should we send back or reports of a political situation. How would you fit in?

CARRINGTON: I'm trying to recall some of the specific issues that would have come up. There would be times when I might be able to contribute something on a political situation in terms of some changes that might be coming up just from some of the ministers whom I knew. Now, one of the problems that a lot Peace Corps Directors had in the countries where they were was that some Ambassadors or their DCMs would insist that the Peace Corps Director and, in fact, the rest of the country team not have meetings with ministers and this sort of thing without their approval.

I was fortunate. In all three countries that I was in I never had that restriction, and so I was able to wheel and deal quite a bit. There was always a complaint that, if you invite Africans to your house to parties, they wouldn't come, etc. I had very little of that problem. One of the things that helped me was that my wife was very much involved, and she knew a lot of the wives of these people. She got to know them, and so you'd invite them as couples and we were able to have, I think, a deeper relationship with most of the government officials than almost anybody else on the country team.

So the Ambassador would ask for my opinions like everybody else's on various kinds of things but always aware that the Peace Corps really was going to be separate from

the rest of the Embassy in terms of some of things that we did. Now, the Peace Corps Director, for example, was not on the diplomatic list—we did not carry diplomatic passports so that we did not have diplomatic immunity. But, at least in my experiences, I always felt that I was an integral part of the country team.

Q: Well, you left Senegal in 1967.

CARRINGTON: Yes.

Q: And then were you involved in international affairs?

CARRINGTON: Right. I came back to the United States and came back to the Washington office of the Peace Corps and eventually became Deputy Director of African Operations and then became Director for all African Operations of the Peace Corps. I stayed in Washington until 1971 and left the Peace Corps then. And I was there for the change-over when the Republicans came in and the Nixon people came in.

In fact, I had been named by the then Director of the Peace Corps, Jack Vaughn to be the new General Counsel of the Peace Corps. And when the election came and the Republicans came in, I remember the new Director of the Peace Corps, Joe Blatchford, called me up to his office and said that he had a problem, that he had a hundred qualified Republican lawyers who wanted the job of General Counsel. But he really had nobody who could serve as Director for Africa. And so he asked me to take the Africa job instead of the General Counsel's job.

And I remember a lot of us at the time in the Peace Corps were wondering whether we ought to stay on or whether we ought to leave, and I felt as some others did that it was important to keep the continuity, and so I stayed on until '71 as Regional Director for Africa.

Then I left the Peace Corps and went up to New York to become Executive Vice President of the African American Institute and served there until 1980 when I was appointed by President Carter to be Ambassador to Senegal.

Q: How did this appointment come about?

CARRINGTON: Well, it was a strange thing because I was getting ready to leave the Institute, wasn't sure what I was going to do, and I had been down in Washington in January of '80. President Carter had a meeting to reassess sort of foreign policy and to bring in a lot support because there were a lot of things happening. And I remember going into this meeting at the White House, and there were all of the famous names of American foreign policy. You had Schlesinger, you had everybody who had served in either a Republican or Democratic administrations. They were all there. And then there were some others of us who were sort of representing organizations involved in international things.

And there were a number of issues being discussed. The morning session was run by the Secretary of State, and in the afternoon the President came in. And one of the issues that came up was whether or not we ought to press for military bases in East Africa, and I got up and said I thought that was a terrible idea and I went into a number of reasons why, and so forth and so on. And then I remember we left that meeting, and as I was coming out with a couple of friends, and as we came out of the White House, all these limousines were waiting and all these big names got in the limousines and zipped off. Some of us who had to grab taxis walked down to the entrance and all the reporters were there. Well, they weren't able to get any interviews from anybody else, so they grabbed us. And I remember a reporter asking me a question about what had gone on and so forth and asked me a question about this very issue that I had raised serious questions about. And I gave a little thing about extending the cold war in Africa and how I thought that was unwise.

Got on the shuttle back to New York. I walk into my apartment, and my son who was then 5 years old comes running up and say, “Daddy, Daddy, I just saw you on TV.” And my wife

comes in and says, “You've just had a call from the White House.” And I said, “What in the hell is going on?” So I called back and it was Louis Martin, who was one of the advisers to the President, and Louis was a person I had known for a long time. In fact, I first met Louis in Nigeria back in '58 when I took a group of people over the experiment in international living. And Louis, who had been a newsman, was over there for summer working with the Daily Times of Lagos, the biggest newspaper there helping them. So I had known Louis. And Louis called me and said that the President wanted to put my name forward for an ambassadorship. And so I said, “Well, what country are they talking about?” He said, “I don't know.” He said, “It's Cameroon, Senegal. I don't know.” And so he said, “Can I tell him yes?” And I said, “Well, you know, Louis, I'd like to know exactly what country plus I've got to talk to my wife and so forth. I'll have to get back to you.” And I also said, “Wait a minute. You ought to know what happened today.” And I told him. He said, “Don't worry about it. It's good to shake them up a little bit.”

So I remember the next morning I got a call from a friend of mine down here who said, “What the hell is going on? Louis Martin thinks you're crazy. Here the President has offered you this ambassadorship and you're waffling and so forth.” And I told him I was waiting to find out what country it was. And so my friend said, “Well, Louis tells me it's Senegal.” And so as soon as I heard it was Senegal, I called back and said yes I'd be happy to take it. Senegal is a country that I had very special kind of relationship with.

And so this was in January of '80. I remember them asking me how soon I could be ready to go and—I said that I would be ready to go end of March, early April, no problem. And they said, okay, fine. And then this, of course, was an election year and the wheels ground exceedingly slow and I remember that it was June or July when I was first asked to come down for hearings and came down and sat in the hearing room all day and they never got to me. Jesse Helms was playing a delaying game, wanting to delay all appointments until after the election, and I guess it wasn't until late July, early August that finally got the hearings and, again, Jesse Helms was delaying. There was a group of us who had come

up for confirmation, and there were one or two people that Helms was really after and he was just holding up the whole group.

And George McGovern walked into the hearings. He was on the committee. And McGovern was also then chairman of the subcommittee on Africa. And he said, “I understand there are some problems,” he said, “but I notice there are five people here who have been waiting quite a while for appointment in Africa.” He said, “Let's lay these other things aside and bring the five up as a group.” So he took us up as a group and asked us a few questions, and sometime in August the official appointment came through, went down, was sworn in, and arrived in Senegal—I remember the date because I arrived there on my son's sixth birthday on the 18th of September.

Q: Did you have any particular instructions before you went to Senegal about what was to be done and what the State Department wanted or anything?

CARRINGTON: Well, I had a very peculiar kind of orientation. When I went to the Department, I went through the normal kind of group orientation, etc., but when I came down to specifics, the Desk Officer for Senegal had just left. A new guy was just sort of coming on and I was kind of caught between stools. I never, ever sat down and talked with the Assistant Secretary, Dick Moose, before I left. I had one brief meeting with one of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries. I had really very little in the way of any kind of orientation or any specific instructions in terms of anything that was a result of sort of sitting down head to head conversations.

I remember writing the remarks I was going to make to President Senghor when I presented my papers, but I had no real specific sort of charges in terms of our policy in Senegal. I knew what the issues were that were of concern to the Department in terms of —well, I had read all the cables, etc., and talked to some of the people. But, as I say, I was hampered in the sense that I did not have a Desk Officer who really had been there very long or who knew much about what was going on.

Q: What were the issues at the time you were there between Senegal and the United States?

CARRINGTON: Well, as I said, I arrived there on the 18th, on my son's birthday. I arrived there early in the morning, went to get some sleep. There was going to be a party for my son that afternoon. In the middle of the party I'm called away. The Foreign Minister wants to see me.

Now, I had just arrived in the country. I hadn't presented my papers. The Foreign Minister wanted to see me urgently. He was off to a meeting. I think it may have been a UNESCO meeting. And the issue was coming up as to the expulsion of Israel from this body. And he urgently wanted to talk to us about what his position was going to be, because the US had been urging the Senegalese to vote no on the question. And I remember there had been some discussions about this before I left Washington. And my position before I left Washington had been that since it required a vote of an affirmative majority that an abstention for our purposes was as good as a no vote and that we ought not to press the Senegalese for a no vote. We should try to get them to abstain. That was agreed to, and I got the assurance of the Foreign Minister that Senegal would abstain on the vote. And they did. So I was able to report back on my first day that I had this meeting and that the Senegalese were going to go along and were going to abstain.

As I remember, there were a number of Middle East connected issues that came up during those first few days when I was in Senegal. And like three or four days after I arrived there, there was a large delegation that came from the United States headed by the President's scientific advisor. And the question came as to whether I would accompany them to the meeting with the President since I hadn't yet formally presented my papers to the President. And Senghor said, fine, he wanted me to come along. So I took the delegation there.

There were at the time issues of cooperation between the United States and Senegal having to do with some of our space program and NASA wanted to have a tracking station there in Senegal. And that was one of the things that we negotiated during my time there.

Q: There was a tracking station?

CARRINGTON: Yes.

Q: Well, did you find, going back, you were sort of like an old shoe going back to Senegal. So you really didn't have to spend much time getting oriented.

CARRINGTON: Yes, that was a great advantage. It was an advantage in two ways. One, in terms of being able to really hit the ground running in Senegal. And, number two, I don't think I had the problems that often non-career people have when they go to a post.

Q: You'd been on three country teams before.

CARRINGTON: Yes, right, and I knew Senegal. And I was very blessed with a very strong country team.

Q: I was going to ask you, how did you find the Embassy staffing? Not numbers. But I mean effectiveness.

CARRINGTON: I thought it was an extremely effective country team. I was fortunate in being able to pick my DCM, and I picked a guy who was just—

Q: Who was your DCM?

CARRINGTON: Ed DeJarnette, who later became Ambassador to the Central Africa Republic after he left Senegal. The AID Director, Dave Shear, was somebody whom I had known before, and he was I think the best AID Director in Africa.

Q: So actually when you went there your appearance was really atypical, because you were really accepted as one of the boys?

CARRINGTON: Yes, because I had had this experience with Peace Corps. I had had this 10 year experience with the African American Institute, so I had been involved in African affairs. I was not somebody coming out who had to learn things from scratch, so I was very fortunate. I have always considered myself to be not a political appointee but a professional appointee. So that was a great help to me.

Q: How did you find, for example—and, again, keeping this unclassified, but it's a question that I put to everybody—how did the CIA work with you there? Any problems?

CARRINGTON: Not really. I was able to establish a good rapport with the Station Chief, and there wasn't the problem of a back channel communications. And there were a number of things that we were able to work very effectively on together.

As somebody who came from a kind of a liberal political orientation, one of the things that I found that my experience both when I was with the Peace Corps and with the Embassy—and maybe I was as you said atypical experiences—but I always found in all the countries I was in that the CIA people were among the brightest and the most enlightened of the people working for the US government, so that I have always had a very positive feeling towards the CIA people I've seen in the field. Now, I may have gotten a very skewed sample.

Q: Well, this is why I ask this question. Sometimes it's a problem, sometimes not. But you found it to be an organization which gave you good information. How about your political section? Were the officers able to get out and around?

CARRINGTON: Yes.

Q: You were getting good input?

CARRINGTON: Yes. I was. They were getting out. And I found that their analyses of the political situation were very good. And I had no major disagreements with the kind of analysis that they were producing. I thought that they had a really good feel for the situation. Dave Rawson who was the chief political officer I thought was first class.

Q: What were our major interests, say, with Senegal in dealing with some of the other countries, like the Gambia. There was the Chad, Libyan thing was heating up at that time. And Senegal had a very important role and we sort of had a subsidiary role.

CARRINGTON: Yes. First of all, the Senegalese were among the strongest voice, well in fact I think they were the strongest critics of the Libyans in Africa. And in fact the Senegalese were the first country to kick the Libyan embassy out, you know, the People's Bureau, as they called it. So that the Senegalese were also very concerned about Libyan activities in Chad and things that they were trying to do to destabilize the Gambia. Of course the Senegalese are very sensitive about the Gambia because the Gambia is a country which is sort of inserted right in the middle of the country following the Gambia River. So they are very concerned about this. And in fact I would send messages back urging that we take a much stronger stand against the Libyans than we were at the time, and reporting back the Senegalese views of this sort of thing. And they were very concerned about what the Libyans were doing in Chad. So that there was a real working relationship on that issue.

I mentioned the fact that Middle East issues had been a real concern. The Senegalese had recognized the PLO and the PLO had a mission.

Q: Palestine Liberation Organization.

CARRINGTON: Yes, the Palestine Liberation Organization. But the view of President Senghor was that he thought that by so doing he could moderate the views of the PLO.

So the Senegalese, always in international forum; refused to join with other Third World Counties in moving for the expulsion of the Israelis from these organizations.

Q: I think it's important really for the record, Senegal is basically an Islamic country.

CARRINGTON: Yes. Ninety percent of the population is Muslim. Now the president was a Roman Catholic, but the overwhelming population is Muslim and the politics of the country really revolve around the two large Muslim brotherhoods. And they were always very supportive of President Senghor. In fact, I remember when I was there with the Peace Corps in the ''60s, the Israelis had a big embassy. In fact, in the apartment building I lived in, there were a couple of high functionaries of the Israeli mission and I got to know them quite well. And they were involved in a lot of development projects in the country. And of course in the '67 war was when most of the African countries broke diplomatic relations with the Israelis the Senegalese did also, but the Senegalese were never part of that group that tried to push for the expulsion of the Israelis from international organizations.

The other thing was that on the issues that were involved in the non-aligned movement the Senegalese were anti-Cuban and generally voted with the West or in ways that the United States would approve. They were very, very strongly anti-Communist.

Q: Would you find that when you went to the foreign ministry to explain our position say on Cuba and Angola or Ethiopia or wherever, or on other issues, that they would listen or was it a pro forma listening? Were they interested in what we had to say?

CARRINGTON: Yes. Yes, they were. As I say, the fact that the first day there that the Foreign Minister sought me out to discuss this whole question on Israel. The Foreign Minister Niasse was very well regarded back in the State Department, and he was one of the most outspoken people in some of these non-aligned meetings opposing the Cubans, etc.

I'm trying to think of what issues there may have been where we might have had any real serious problems with the Senegalese. I really can't think of any.

Q: If something occurs later, we can add it to the record. How about your relationship with the French? I would imagine that the French Embassy would play a very strong role there.

CARRINGTON: They did. In fact, my closest collaborator on the European side was the Belgian Ambassador. The Belgian Ambassador always thought that the French were up to something. And so he would be always sharing information with me about the latest perfidy that the French were up to. There's no question that on economic issues and a lot of other issues that the French and the American, and the French and everybody else were really in a adversarial sort of relationship. And it was at a time when the Senegalese were anxious to break away from their sort of complete dependence on the French economically. And so the French were always very concerned about what the Americans might be up to or anybody else.

Q: Were we giving economic assistance to Senegal at that time?

CARRINGTON: Yes, we were. Yes, Senegal was receiving aid. In fact, Senegal was the headquarters for our aid effort for the Sahelian states, and so we were doing a lot in terms of bilateral aid to the Senegalese as well as regional things having to do with the Sahelian region in trying to help them recover from the effects of the drought. And we were also giving some military aid to the Senegalese. And I think if there was any place where we had problems was that our aid that we were giving them was very modest because the Carter Administration generally was not willing to do a lot on the military side. And, in fact, the Senegalese did better I think under the Reagan Administration in this regard.

Q: I would have thought the French would have been in there because the Senegalese troops, of course, were a major component of the French Army with a proud record.

CARRINGTON: Yes, the French were still there and, in fact, the French still had a base in Senegal. And the French were the major financial backers of the Senegalese in all spheres, and in military as well.

Q: Moving sort of to our side, you mentioned that you didn't meet Moose before you left. What was your feeling about your support from the African Bureau? Was it a strong bureau or not a strong bureau? Interested, not interested?

CARRINGTON: No, I think it was interested. And I think we got support—I remember there was one issue that I think the Senegalese were most concerned about, and that is that during I guess it was, I can't remember the year, may have been '78, '79, when there was a problem in Zaire. And Moroccan troops went in to help that situation and they were funded and transported by the US. And they used Dakar airport. And as a result they tore up one of the runways. And the Senegalese wanted the US to repair the runway. And that was an ongoing battle and we could never get the US to agree on that.

The other issue at the time where the Senegalese wanted a moratorium on the debt that they owed, and that was a subject of a lot of negotiations and was never really resolved during the time I was there.

Q: You were there when Senghor stepped down from office.

CARRINGTON: That's right.

Q: How did this happen?

CARRINGTON: That I think is one of the most amazing things that I think I've observed in my years of working overseas. Senghor had been the leader of Senegal from before independence. He was still in excellent health, both physically and politically, and could have stayed president for as long as he wanted. But Senghor strongly believed in the democratic tradition and wanting Senegal to remain a very democratic state, and felt that

this idea of people staying on forever as president was not good. And his party had not too long before won reelection, so things were going well for him.

But the thing about Senghor was that if you would go to a political rally where he was making a speech on politics or on economics or what have you, etc., it was a very perfunctory sort of performance. You go with him to the opening of an art museum or a library and the dynamism, the enthusiasm was quite a different thing. Senghor was unlike most politicians everywhere. For him politics was not the be-all and end-all. Senghor is first and foremost an intellectual. I think he felt the time had come when he really ought to step down and there were a lot of other projects he wanted to carry on, a lot of books he wanted to write and so forth.

And so he decided that he would step down and would hand over to his constitutionally designated successor, the Prime Minister, Abdul Diouf, who had been Prime Minister for 10 years under Senghor. And then all kinds of rumors spread and the cynics were all saying that this was all a ploy, that it would never happen, or that he would still control things behind the scene, etc., etc. And there were a lot of questions about what was going to happen, how it was going to take place, etc. Some of the opposition began to raise all kinds of noise. And the President of the Supreme Court, Kebba M'Baye, one of the most impressive men I've met, stepped in and was able to convince everybody that this was real and genuine and was not some kind of a ploy to avoid the next election and so forth and so on.

And I remember on New Year's Day of 1981, they had this President's ceremony in which all the diplomatic corp and everybody was there, when President Senghor stepped down and Abdul Diouf was sworn in as the new President. And Senghor was as good as his word, he retired completely. Did not try to hold on to the party apparatus as, for example, Nyerere did in Tanzania, and stepped aside and retired to his villa near the university and has been writing, pursuing various intellectual projects.

Q: Speaking of changes of government, you got caught in one, too. Had you planned to stay on? Obviously at the pleasure of the President, but had Carter stayed on would you probably have stayed on, do you think?

CARRINGTON: Oh, yes. Because—remember, I arrived there of September of 1980. The election was in November of 1980. And I realized when I went—of course, as I told you, when I was first approached in January of '80 I thought I'd be over there by April and figured that even if Carter lost the election I'd be there at least a year because I knew from past experience that what happens in these situations is that unless you yourself decide to quit as soon as the new guy is elected, that usually they don't get around to replacing you until some six months or so later. And especially in a place like Senegal, Senegal wasn't going to be one of the first places that they were going to take action on. However, after the election a Congressional delegation came out and one of the staff members who was an old friend of mine took me aside and showed me a memorandum that had been written by Chester Crocker to Robert Neumann who was later appointed by Reagan as ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

Q: Chester Crocker was at that time a staff assistant in the House?

CARRINGTON: No, Crocker was at that time teaching at Georgetown but had been part of the transition team and was—

Q: Republican transition team.

CARRINGTON: Yes, the Republican transition team. And was working on the transition team at the State Department. And he was concerned with the transition in terms of Africa, especially. And he had written a memorandum in which he had sort of a hit list on there as to changes they ought to make immediately. And there were two names on there that he said should be removed immediately, two people, myself and Ambassador Holloway, Anne Holloway who was serving in Mali. Anne Holloway had been on the staff of Andy Young

before she had been appointed ambassador. She had been in Mali about two years and I had been in the country not very long.

Q: Why would you have been on Crocker's hit list?

CARRINGTON: I think because we were political appointees and therefore we were part of the Carter Administration and we were probably not sympathetic. Now with Anne, I think he identified her because of her work with Andy Young, etc., as an active Democrat. I had had no real political activity, but he had singled out the two of us. And he thought that we should be replaced immediately.

Q: How was this done, the transition? A previous interview I did with someone who was involved on a Republican transition team who was speaking about, he was dealing with the changeover dealing with the Near Eastern affairs, which said it was done in an expeditious, professional manner, as opposed to the one that was dealing with Latin America where there was blood in the halls practically. And I was wondering on the African side how it was done?

CARRINGTON: Well, as far as I know in '81, I didn't know of a real difference in terms of the Middle East because my understanding was that with one single exception, all of the political appointees were given two weeks notice to leave. The one exception was Mike Mansfield in Japan, for obvious reasons because of his political clout, having been majority leader of the Senate. And we were all given two weeks notice. I remember, I think the President was sworn in on January 20 and I received my cable on January 27 from the Secretary of State Alexander Haig thanking me for my service and telling me to wind up my affairs in two weeks.

Now in my case, having just arrived there in September, I was literally at the time in the middle of unpacking my sea freight when that cable arrived. And I was able to get in touch with some friends back here who got in touch with some people and I had the unusual situation of having Congressman Trent Lott of Mississippi and Senator Dole both weigh

in on my behalf, saying I had just arrived there and that there ought to be a more orderly transfer. All that did really in the end was to buy me an extra month or so. So I left there I guess the end of February and came back.

Q: The election was November 2nd, 3rd, something like that, of 1980. You had only been there a short time. You were sent by Carter, but you were the American representative. Did you find yourself having difficulty selling the effect that our new president was going to be a former movie actor and all this to a rather sophisticated Senegalese administration?

CARRINGTON: Yes, there was a lot of concern about Reagan and about his policies. I remember the night of the election we arranged to have an election eve party and we invited Senegalese from all walks of life, and so forth. And we had a little poll and people as they came in would sort of sign a little piece of paper and put it in a box, just to see how the Senegalese thought the election would go, and 90% of the Senegalese were for Carter. What I told the Senegalese was that I thought that while African policy generally, especially southern African policy, was going to suffer that I thought that our bilateral relations with the Senegalese would be as strong or even stronger because I thought that the Reagan Administration would put much more weight on Senegal's role in terms of its anti-Libyan, anti-Communist and pro-Western stance, and that probably they would get much more military aid than they gotten before. And I thought they would be one of the fair-haired-boys of this administration in terms of Africa.

Q: Was this the case?

CARRINGTON: Yes, I think generally this has been true. The Senegalese relations with the Administration have been very good. So Senegal, unlike other countries like Nigeria and Tanzania, etc., did not suffer because of the change of administrations.

Q: Looking back on it, you were caught sort of, as you mentioned, by an election which caught you at an awkward time. But in the period you were there, what did you feel was your greatest accomplishment?

CARRINGTON: Well, I think that there were a couple—one thing I think is that I think that in terms of the whole Libyan relationship, I think I was able to get the Administration to be more openly critical of the Libyans and supportive of the Senegalese. Because at that point it was long before the Libyans had really been identified in terms of the terrorist thing and the Libyans really had been concentrating on Africa. And the Africans, especially Senegalese, were afraid that we weren't waking up to what the Libyans were doing. And I think a number of things happened, some of them classified that I can't talk about, but was able to get the Senegalese to feel that the US was really becoming much more aware of the Libyan threat than they had been.

While I was there the Libyans attempted their coup in the Gambia. And, in fact, I'll never forget, the Senegalese acted very quickly to put the coup down. In fact, they had moved their troops into the Gambia before even the French knew about it. I mean, they did this operation. In fact, our military attach# was just amazed, he said it was one of the most professional things he had seen. The Senegalese, as soon as the word got out that the Libyans had attempted, that there was this coup attempt backed by the Libyans, the Senegalese had their troops moving and put it down immediately. And that I think was a very impressive demonstration of how effective they could be and how they could act without even the French knowing about it.

As I say, we did negotiate the agreement for the NASA tracking operation while I was there. And while we didn't make the kind of progress on the debt reduction that we had hoped, I think at least we were able to get the Senegalese to understand what some of the problems were and kept it from becoming a really major irritant in relations between Senegal and the United States.

Q: A final question that as a part of this series of interviews that we ask is, is the Foreign Service something which you might recommend to a member of your family? How do you see it as a career?

CARRINGTON: Yes. It would depend on what their ultimate goals are. If somebody comes to me and says, I'd love to be an ambassador someday, I'm not sure I'd recommend that they go into the Foreign Service. [laughter]

Q: With good reason.

CARRINGTON: You know, I think your chances are better if you can establish yourself as a foreign policy specialist on the outside. And that I think is unfortunate. And of course what's happened with this Administration where the percentage of non-career people—

Q: You're speaking about the Reagan Administration?

CARRINGTON: Yes, the Reagan Administration. And in fact sending non-career people to countries—I remember one guy in the Administration was sent off to Equatorial Guinea and I said, what have they got against you? I thought you were a loyal member of the Administration. So that they've, I think, carried it to extremes that have just never been seen before. And I think that's very destructive of morale and it just offers fewer opportunities for people to make it to the top.

I think of careers of people, take a fellow like Don McHenry, who if he had stayed in the Foreign Service would not have reached the prominence that he was able to reach after he left it.

Q: He became ambassador to the United Nations.

CARRINGTON: He became ambassador to the United Nations. So what I would say is that if you go into the Foreign Service, go in and do a couple of tours and then come out and do something else on the private side in international relations.

Q: Well, Mr. Ambassador, I thank you very much for this.

End of interview